

Hebrews 4:1-3, 8-13

MW Lent 4, March 6, 2024
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Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

³ For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world... ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Have you noticed that people don't rest much anymore? Adults are expected to work their forty hours per week and then some. But it's not just the work. There might be evening meetings for different organizations. There are late nights spent fixing things around the house, cleaning, folding laundry. Parents spend hours shuffling their kids to all their different activities. And between school, homework, sports, dance, band, and part-time jobs, kids don't get much rest either. Even retirees are kept busy taking care of their children, grandchildren, great grandchildren—and then you have to make time for hobbies and everything else in your life.

When you *do* get a chance to rest, it can be hard to simply turn off your brain and enjoy a good night's sleep. But while it may feel like you're always on the move, going here and there, always busy, never stopping—there is rest available. And it's available right now. Today, as we continue our Lenten meditations on the book of Hebrews, I want to encourage you once more to **Keep Your Eyes on Jesus Who Endured the Cross**. Eyes on Him, you will find that **He Is Our Rest**.

Before we speak anymore about "rest," we should start by defining the word "rest." Does rest simply mean "not being tired" or "not worn out"? Is rest turning off your brain and relaxing in front of the TV for an hour or two at the end of the day? Is rest packing up and moving to a deserted island? Maybe resting for you is going fishing, or working on something with your hands? Humanly speaking, I think most of us would agree that some of those things are quite restful.

But the *rest* that *God* offers you today is the one that you need more than anything. The rest that God invites you to experience today is the one that comes from having peace and relief with God. Now, that type of rest doesn't necessarily promise an easing of a hectic schedule. But what God offers us is a break from being worn out by sin. And this type of rest can only be found with God.

This is something that the author of the book of Hebrews tells us that the Israelites forgot. We hear, *"For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. . . As [God] swore, . . . 'They shall not enter my rest.'"* What God is so angry about is that He had led them out of Egypt, He miraculously walked them through Red Sea on dry ground, He appeared to them at Mount Sinai—and they still

rejected Him! He led them *all the way* to the Promised Land, only for them to refuse to go in because they were scared. They doubted His power and protection, and so God said that no one over twenty years of age would enter the land He had promised. They would find no physical rest, and instead they would wander aimlessly in the wilderness for forty years. No rest—because they had rejected the rest that God offered.

But failing to find their rest in God went much further than just refusing the land flowing with milk and honey. They heard His Word, they heard His promises, they saw His almighty power, and they still refused to believe. And as a result of that disobedience, not only would they lack the physical rest, they would be severely lacking in spiritual rest as well.

As Christians, we need to be aware that we could lose our rest like them. The author of the Hebrews writes, ***“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”*** We can refuse God’s rest by living in unbelief. We can lose the peace we have by doubting Him, by hardening our hearts towards what He has to say. What God expected of the Israelites was clear, and what He expects of us is very clear as well. He calls on us to obey His commandments, and if we choose sin over God’s will, we’re rejecting His rest as well.

Towards the end of our text, we read, ***“For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*** In God’s Word, our sins are revealed to us. And when we really look at what God expects, His law slices through every pretense. The deception, the deceit, the façade of being good people—it’s sliced right through by the Law and reveals what we are: sinners who choose sin. We’ve hurt others, we’ve hurt God, we’ve hurt ourselves as we’ve broken God’s Commandments. We have disobeyed, showing we deserve no rest. And there’s no way out of this judgment, as verse 13 says: ***“And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*** We’re exposed. We’ve been discovered. The only rest the Israelites received after disregarding God’s will was to be buried beneath the desert sand, and we should not fare any better at all, having done all the same as them.

So, are you feeling rested right now? Or is it getting a little uncomfortable in here? I hope you’re not feeling rested. I hope you’re feeling tired. Because only by being tired and worn out by sin can you truly appreciate the rest that God gives. We mentioned it earlier, but it bears repeating: the rest we need isn’t physical, it’s spiritual. We need the rest that peace and forgiveness offer. Our reading says, ***“There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from His.”*** This is what we need! We need a special rest, a respite in which we lie in our Father’s arms and feel the sin that wears us down being taken away.

And we find exactly that rest in our Savior. We can rest in God’s arms because that’s where He wants us to be. He wants us to be with Him, to find peace in His Word, to know what it means to have the burdensome load of sin taken from our shoulders. And He wants this rest for you so badly, that He didn’t give His own Son rest. His Son carried His own cross to Golgotha, but the terrible weight wasn’t just in the wood, it was in your sin and mine. He carried that extra weight of sin in His body as He sagged under that burden on the cross. He endured Hell and torment without a break until He gave

up His life. Then for three days He rested in the tomb, until He emerged—to never be tired again! To be alive forever! And it's in His *lack* of rest on the cross and His rest in the tomb that you can now find *your* rest. You find here the forgiveness and the break that you need. No longer do your sins need to weigh you down. No longer do you have to feel lost and condemned. The good news is that we have been forgiven, and in this promise we finally have rest.

Now, if you're like me, you've been feeling very tired lately. We all go through those phases, maybe it's bad sleep or preparation for company, whatever it is, we've all gone through those periods of extreme weariness. And at times like these, it can be tempting to forego time with the Lord, whether that be at church or at home, just because you're so tired. But when we're physically tired like this, let's remember that God's Word offers us the real, needed rest.

Our text says God's Word is sharper than any two-edged sword. It's also called the ***"sword of the Spirit"*** in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The point is, the Word of God is the only weapon we need when confronted and wearied by Satan and his temptations. And nothing can defeat the Word of God. When it says you are forgiven, you are forgiven. When it says the devil must flee when the Word is spoken, the devil must flee. When it says you have peace, you have peace. When it says you have rest, you have rest. The Bible gives everything it says because it's *not* just a bunch of nice words, it is the power of God to give you rest. So, use it! Cling to it! Even when you're tired, *especially* when you're tired, grab your Bible and find your rest.

You know the saying, "There's no rest for the wicked." It's true. The Israelites rejected God, found no rest, and perished in the wilderness. To reject God, to reject His Word, to reject His love and forgiveness is to reject His rest. And that results in an eternity without rest.

But for you, there is rest. Not necessarily rest from hectic lives, although I think spending an hour with the Lord at church does actually provide that rest as well, but even more importantly, you have a rest that is found in the forgiveness of your sins. An eternal rest with Jesus. This is what God has given you, so rest! And keep your eyes on Jesus who endured the cross so that you might have this rest. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.